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OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

9 April 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL O/RR ANALYSTS

We have had a good deal of discussion in recent weeks as to how to handle incoming documents. At one extreme was a proposal for an Office Reading Panel to examine all incoming documents and screen out the bulk of them, routing to the analysts only such items as were pertinent to the particular job they were currently working on.

The argument in favor of this system, with which I have considerable sympathy, is that our basic job is not to keep informed about current events but to do basic research. Without such a system, it was feared, each analyst is in danger of being so swamped by a flood of material to read that he will never have time for his basic work.

Against this it was argued that it is the responsibility of every research worker, in government, industry or academic life, to allocate his time between reading, thinking, and writing so as to maximize the value of his output. He and he alone, it was said, can take responsibility for deciding what he does and does not need to study. He is judged by the total results of his efforts, and must stand or fall by what he turns out. No one else can decide for him what it is important for him to see.

This argument seems to me compelling, and it has therefore been agreed that for the time being, on a trial basis, the Office Reading Panel will perform an allocating function only, routing virtually everything to the analysts. In approving this system experimentally I want to emphasize several things:

First, this puts it squarely up to each of you to see to it that the examination of incoming material does not interfere with your research output.

Second, the flow of incoming material cannot take the place of active searching of all available sources -- the library, the various registers, the resources of other agencies -- for material relevant to a particular study.

Third, our responsibility for giving some support to Current Intelligence is a secondary one. You are not responsible for insuring that all items of possible current interest are extracted from your "in" basket.

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Fourth, if you want the Reading Panel to screen out certain kinds of material under your direction, they will be glad to cooperate.

Fifth, if under this system the document flow seems to be taking up too much of everybody's time, we will try the alternative.

Sixth, I hope you will all feel free to give reactions or suggestions on procedure to [REDACTED].

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